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THE RELIGION THAT JESUS LIVED

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The picture of Jesus given to us in the Gospels, especially by the synoptists, is for the most part that of a singularly objective life. Not that there is not much of self-disclosure, direct and indirect. Inwardness and searching of the heart of man are moreover the characteristics of his teaching. Otherworldliness, too, in pre-eminent degree, marks both the life and the teaching of Jesus. But the mood of the *Confessions of St. Augustine*, or of *The Imitation*, one does not find. His fellowship with God, constant, conscious, predominant in all his life, appears as the most natural, the most joyous, the strongest life a man can live. This strong, joyous, natural communion with God may be seen in various traits of his character.

I. HIS ENTERPRISE OF PERFECT OBEDIENCE

As has before been pointed out in these papers, from the Baptism to Gethsemane and Calvary, obedience was the law of Jesus' life. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34) was Jesus' confession of the innermost secret of his being. "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39) was not first learned by him in Gethsemane. His whole life had made inarticulately the same avowal.

He conceived of obedience as no mere matter of conformity to precepts or acceptance of tradition. It was far deeper and more real than that. His easygoing, though highly trained, contemporaries in religious teaching found him guilty of much carelessness concerning practice and not a little heresy concerning belief, because he saw into the heart of customs and beliefs and found the meaning of them for men's life, and because he was utterly loyal to that inner, exacting, spiritual meaning of customs and beliefs. He heard constantly the still, small voice, which called to an

obedience rooted in uttermost loyalty of heart to the will of God. "Not everyone that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). These words he taught not only by precept; they echo from every side of his character and life.

Obedience gave to him, what he declared it would give to all, a quiet and exultant freedom of spirit (cf. John 8:31, 32). How exacting such freedom is Jesus taught in his restatement of the law—as of murder, lust, lying, and the like (Matt. 5:21-48). But that utterly obedient life is the life of those who attain to sonship to God (Matt. 5:45). When Jesus called the heavy laden to him for rest, his secret of peace was "his yoke" (Matt. 11:28-30). He found perfect obedience an easy yoke and a light burden. The calm spirit with which he met all the crises of his life—from the fire of early temptation to his word of victory after Gethsemane, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11)—and his whole bearing of freedom from fear of pain or ill, are the fruits of the emancipating power of his perfect obedience.

The obedience which Jesus rendered, like that which he enjoined, was obedience to a heavenly mission. The Fourth Gospel sets in strong light what the synoptists exhibit throughout, namely his consciousness of being sent to do a work for God. It was in fulfilment of that mission that he earned the taunting title, "Friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt. 11:19). It was not accidental that his supreme teaching concerning God's redeeming love (Luke, chap. 15) was in answer to a pharisaic objection to his association with men and women whom his contemporaries looked upon as outcasts. This certainty that obedience to God meant the fulfilment of a heavenly mission sets Jesus far apart from that pious self-seeking that would flee the world to win salvation. "Whosoever willeth to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever may lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25) was his law for the disciples. This is a far remove from religious asceticism. The searching self-denial he enjoined was a forgetting of self in absorbing obedience to the heavenly mission, the fulfilment of which was, according to his teaching and example, the doing of the will of God.

So the enterprise of obedience, which was one of Jesus' supreme undertakings, was not so much a task as it was his very life. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me."

II. HIS UNQUESTIONING TRUST IN GOD

The story of the Temptation, however the evangelists came by it, reveals the inner secret of Jesus' religion of perfect obedience. That secret was his perfect trust in God. The counterfeit of trust—that is, religious presumption—was the evil involved in the temptation of the pinnacle of the temple. Such presumption bases itself on the most pious of practices and the most orthodox of ideas. The tempter quotes Scripture: "He shall give his angels charge over thee." He appeals to the need for running great risks, for working against apparently hopeless odds, he appeals also to the need for impressing the popular mind—if indeed this Galilean is to lead God's people into his kingdom. In all ages men of earnest mind and pious habit have fallen into the snare. Jesus saw more clearly because he trusted God more perfectly: "It is written, thou shalt not put the Lord thy God to the test" (Matt. 4:7). He was obedient to his own more perfect heavenly vision. If God had indeed called him to usher in the kingdom, it must be because the kingdom needed such a one as he for its leader. True to himself and trusting in God, he obeyed. In like perfect trust and unfaltering dependence on God he pursued his course through popularity that would have misled, as well as through contempt and open hostility that would have dismayed, a less perfectly trustful soul, even unto Gethsemane and Calvary.

His life of prayer was the necessary outcome of this perfect trust. Prayer was the very breath of his life—whether in the night solitudes when he escaped from the urgency of popular demands, or amid the crowds with and for whom he did his mighty works, or in the last supreme crisis of the Garden. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46) was the last word on the cross, because it has been the supreme word of every day of his life. When he told his disciples that faith even as a grain of mustard seed could make the greatest obstacles to be surmountable, he was declaring what his own spirit had proved to be uttermost verity.

The name by which Jesus taught his followers to think of God and to call upon him in perfect confidence was the name by which he himself knew God with the most perfect knowledge of personal communion. Nothing so exhibits the perfectness of Jesus' trust as the transcending intimacy of his appeal to "my father which is in heaven." Nothing so clearly reveals his superiority to formulas of traditional belief. The splendid distinction of Enoch, who walked with God, was truer of Jesus than of any other soul of man. When, after his searching spiritual ministry to the Samaritan woman, the disciples were amazed at his indifference to natural hunger, they could not fathom the truth of his confession, "I have meat to eat that ye know not" (John 4:32). In deepest reality his meat was to do God's will, because his life was one of utter intimacy of communion with God. Of that intimacy of communion, obedience and perfect trust were the inevitable fruits.

III. HIS PROFOUNDLY ETHICAL PIETY

Because religion is the conscious fellowship of the spirit of man with the unseen, otherworldliness has always been a prominent trait of strongly religious natures. Monastic seclusion and manifold ascetic practices have been the marks of that otherworldliness in many forms of religion—Christian and non-Christian. To such otherworldly temperaments Jesus offers many perplexities. In his own day men contrasted him with John, the prophet of the wilderness, who "came neither eating nor drinking," and some mocked him as "a gluttonous man and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt. 11:18, 19). His intimacy of fellowship with common life was fundamental to his character and no accident. Still less was it an inconsistency. He who spent the night in the mountains in prayer, while eager multitudes sought for him; he who sent other multitudes away and dismissed even the disciples, that he might in solitude fortify himself for his increasingly difficult enterprise of obedience, was not another man but the same who accepted the eager hospitality of Matthew the publican, who sat at meat in the house of his negligent Pharisee host, who sought out Zacchaeus, and who found welcome refreshment in the love of his friends at Bethany.

That this is so appears in all his religious teaching—for that teaching is the truest revelation of his own religious life. Men have often found it strange that so little that is new in idea has been contributed by Jesus to the world's ethical teaching. Yet he has attained the unique position of the world's supreme teacher of ethics as well as of religion. His significance lies in the fact that by him religion and everyday righteousness were indissolubly knit together. Even the worship of God, he taught, must be interrupted if need be to right a human wrong (Matt. 5:23, 24). And if men are indeed to be sons of God they must, he taught, be God-like in their regard for and ministry to their fellow-men, irrespective of the seeming deservedness of such men for love and respect (Matt. 5:44-48). Like the prophet Micah, Jesus in life as well as in word taught that "walking humbly with God" cannot be severed from "doing justly and loving mercy."

His attitude toward religious ceremonials—like the Sabbath regulations and the rules of ceremonial cleanliness—is highly significant as an indication of his profoundly ethical piety. In precept and by parable, no less than in conduct, he constantly affirmed the social character of religion. He who sees in secret, desires to discover in his children the kind of roots that will bring forth the fruits of righteousness that may be seen of men, even though it must never be done in order to be seen of men. (Matt. 5:16; 6:1).

For a religion of spiritual self-seeking he had only sternest rebuke as has already been noticed: "He that seeketh his life shall lose it." He stands as the undying rebuke of all such self-seeking. "Even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister" (Mark 10:45). Self-denial he enjoined and practiced—the self-denial of complete absorption in the good of others, for the establishing of God's kingdom among men.

IV. HIS OTHERWORLDLINESS

Yet Jesus' life was one of most supreme otherworldliness. In fact, his chief religious significance was his demonstration of the possible and certain triumph of the other world in and over the present order of life. His message was the kingdom of heaven. His whole life was devoted to the establishment of that kingdom of

heaven. Of no other man who has ever lived was it true as it was true of him that "his citizenship was in heaven." And heaven was for him not simply an idea or a hope. It meant the scene of God's complete dominion. That complete dominion he for himself acknowledged, and he sought to establish it on earth. Against the popular ideas he taught that that kingdom "cometh not with observation," but is wherever God's will is acknowledged as supreme (Luke 17:20, 21). His parables of the Leaven and of the Mustard Seed are his own confession of faith. When we follow sympathetically the last days of his earthly life, and note his quiet confidence, his patience and his strength; when we apprehend the meaning of his high expectation in his word to Peter: "On this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18); when we listen understandingly to his triumphant cry on Calvary, "It is finished" (John 19:30), we find ourselves admitted to the sanctuary of his own religious life, and discover something of its perfect otherworldliness. Then, too, we begin to understand something of the breadth and depth of his faith, and of his certainty that God and heaven and the eternal victory belong to this present life, that God and heaven are working for the triumph of righteousness and brotherhood in this present life. The vision of John who saw the new Jerusalem *descending from God out of heaven*, to be established on the earth was a true Christian ideal. To accomplish the realization of that ideal Jesus lived and died and rose again.

V. THE ISOLATION OF JESUS

The Friend of publicans and sinners, the chosen Lord and Master of his faithful disciples, was followed by them "afar off" on his way to Calvary. So, in fact, though unconsciously had they followed him thitherto. So have men followed him since. With all the marvelous friendliness of heart, and perfect approachableness of Jesus; with all his natural and evident hunger for the friendly approach of men to him, particularly in the crises of his life as in Gethsemane, yet beyond any other life known to men, his was a life apart. Otherworldliness was a trait of his religion, because the otherworld was in a pre-eminent sense that in which he

was most at home, and the Father in heaven, whom with peculiar disclosure of deepest intimacy of kinship he called habitually "my Father," was closer to him in spiritual fellowship than any of the disciples or faithful friends of his earthly days. None of his followers, then or afterward, though aspiring with great desire for fullest conformity to his likeness, has ventured to claim any such intimacy of fellowship with God. None of his followers, then or afterward, though entering eagerly into the work he came to perform, has disclosed a consciousness like his of a heavenly mission. Grant all that may be granted in the way of a coloring of the gospel records by the Christian thinking which grew up after the first Easter, the root of that Christian exaltation of Jesus was the exalted impression made by Jesus. The early disciples knew him to be a man apart. They could follow with ardent devotion. They could not wholly understand or comprehend him.

And yet, isolated as in many ways his life was, he was for those disciples the veriest realization of manhood's destiny. His invitation, "Follow me," thrilled, but did not mock them. That exalted thought, which grew up out of the effort of Christian devotion to understand the Lord's supreme dignity and meaning, firmly declared him to be "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29), to whose image it was God's clear purpose that his followers should be conformed.

So he lived among men—as the man from heaven illuminating the earthly life; obedient even until death, with a trust unalterable in his God and Father; of the otherworld, yet transfiguring this world through the message and example of simple righteousness. He walked with God as a son peculiarly beloved, he lived with man as a friend and helper and teacher of heavenly truth. And in all, his meat was to do the will of Him that sent him, and to finish His work.